



**UNITED KINGDOM:
ENGLAND IN WINTER TOUR**

09 – 22 JANUARY 2023

08 – 21 JANUARY 2024



Eurasian Bittern is one of our secretive targets on this trip.

Situated on the northwestern edge of Europe and the Western Palearctic biogeographical zone, the United Kingdom (UK) is blessed (as a result of the Gulf Stream) with milder winters than most of continental Europe at a similar latitude. As such, large numbers of birds find themselves overwintering in the country rather than needing to fly farther south, thus saving themselves vital energy resources to survive these difficult months.

This tour of the eastern side of England occurs during the mid-winter period and will focus on finding a wide range of resident species and numerous winter visitors. Overwintering wildfowl, shorebirds (called waders in these parts), gulls, thrushes, finches, tits, buntings, and other passerines from northern and eastern Europe and further east into Asia swell numbers of birds usually present in the country and provide an interesting suite of birds to chase after.

Some of our targets will include **Whooper Swan**, **Tundra (Bewick's) Swan**, **Pink-footed Goose**, **Taiga Bean Goose**, **Tundra Bean Goose**, **Greater White-fronted Goose**, **Greater Scaup**, **Smew**, **Long-tailed Duck**, **Common Scoter**, **Velvet Scoter**, **Caspian Gull**, **Yellow-legged Gull**, **Iceland Gull**, **Glaucous Gull**, **Mediterranean Gull**, **Purple Sandpiper**, **European Golden Plover**, **Fieldfare**, **Redwing**, **Black Redstart**, **Horned (Shore) Lark**, **Snow Bunting**, **Lapland Longspur** (Lapland Bunting), **Twite**, **Brambling**, **Hawfinch**, and with luck, as it is an irruptive species, **Bohemian Waxwing**, one of the best-looking birds in Europe.



***Bohemian Waxwing** is an irruptive winter visitor to the United Kingdom. It is always a crowd-pleaser when it does appear, sometimes in large numbers.*

There are many rare, scarce, very localized, or just plain secretive wintering species in England during the winter months, and we will target lots of these during the tour, including **Bearded Reedling** (Bearded Tit), **Eurasian Bittern**, **Hen Harrier**, **Ruff**, **Eurasian Spoonbill**, **Willow**

Ptarmigan (Red Grouse), Black Grouse, Water Rail, Eurasian Woodcock, Short-eared Owl, Long-eared Owl, Common Kingfisher, and Common Crane.

For a visiting birder, or anyone interested in bird photography, this tour also offers great views of some of the common and gorgeous resident birds present in the United Kingdom, such as **European Robin, Eurasian Bullfinch, Eurasian Blue Tit, Great Tit, European Nuthatch, European Greenfinch, European Goldfinch, Common Blackbird, Song Thrush, Northern Lapwing, Western Marsh Harrier** (at impressive roost sites), **Red Kite**, and many more. Our "Common Birds of the UK" blog series provides an illustrated look at the common garden, farmland and woodland, and wetland and coastal birds of the UK. These birds will also form an exciting part of this tour for anyone not familiar with the birds of the region.



*A **European Robin** standing in the snow – a special winter-birding moment.*

Itinerary (14 days/13 nights)

Day 1. Arrival in London and transfer to a hotel near Heathrow Airport

After your arrival in London (Heathrow) during the day, you will transfer to our hotel with time at your leisure. We will gather for our group evening welcome meal together in the evening. If you would like to explore the many tourist attractions that London has to offer (such as Big Ben and the Palace of Westminster, Buckingham Palace, St Paul's Cathedral, Tower Bridge, The

Natural History Museum, and many more), please organize for an early arrival or later departure. We can help arrange your plans for these activities should you need any help.

Overnight: Heathrow Airport area, London

Days 2 - 6. Birding Norfolk and Suffolk

We will leave London and travel to our base in the county of Norfolk for the next five nights. Our base will be great for exploring Norfolk and neighboring Suffolk over the coming days. Our journey from London will give us the opportunity to get our birding underway as we drive northeast, with a few strategic stops planned for along the way!

The region is rightly considered one of the best birding areas in the whole of the United Kingdom and great for a varied selection of overwintering birds. Some of the coastal and inland reserves we will likely visit during our time in the area include Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) Titchwell Marsh reserve, RSPB Lakenheath Fen reserve, RSPB Snettisham reserve, RSPB Minsmere reserve, Norfolk Wildlife Trust (NWT) Cley and Salthouse Marshes, NWT Hickling Broad and Marshes, Wildfowl and Wetland Trust (WWT) Welney Wetland Centre, Thetford Forest, and Holkham Hall and Estate, among many others.

Early in our tour we will likely see a range of common species that will become very familiar, such as **Eurasian Blue Tit**, **Great Tit**, **European Goldfinch**, **Eurasian Bullfinch**, **Common Wood Pigeon**, and **Eurasian Magpie**. We will also find our first overwintering **Fieldfare** and **Redwing**. At this time of the year many of the **Common Blackbirds**, **Song Thrushes**, and **European Robins** present in the UK are also of continental European origin.



Eurasian Bullfinch, a beautiful and often secretive species.

While birding in Norfolk and Suffolk we will seek out the vast array of wildfowl on offer. This should include flocks of **Pink-footed Geese** and **Greylag Geese** (the former forming flocks in the thousands) as well as scarcer species such as **Brant Goose** (the dark-bellied form known as Dark-bellied Brent Goose), **Barnacle Goose**, **Tundra Bean Goose**, and **Greater White-fronted Goose**. Sometimes the geese flocks in Norfolk (and further north when birding later in the tour) can contain a scarcity or rarity and we will keep our eyes firmly peeled for anything unusual, we may get lucky and find **Taiga Bean Goose** for example. Other wildfowl we are likely to see include **Whooper Swan**, **Tundra (Bewick's) Swan**, **Mute Swan**, **Common Shelduck**, **Common Scoter**, **Velvet Scoter**, **Common Eider**, **Long-tailed Duck**, **Tufted Duck**, **Greater Scaup**, and **Common Pochard**. With luck we might even find **Smew**, a scarce winter visitor to the UK.



*A pair of **Pink-footed Geese** (left) sit with a pair of **Tundra Bean Geese** (right) as they take a brief break from foraging.*

The shorebird spectacle along the coasts of Norfolk and Suffolk at this time of year can be remarkable, particularly at high tide, and we will make sure to check out some roost sites. Impressive numbers of **Red Knot**, **Bar-tailed Godwit**, **Eurasian Oystercatcher**, **Eurasian Curlew**, **Sanderling**, **Dunlin**, and other species such as **Common Ringed Plover**, **European Golden Plover**, **Northern Lapwing**, and **Grey Plover** are likely. Nearby marsh habitat could hold the locally scarce **Spotted Redshank** with abundant **Common Redshank** and **Common Snipe** easily found. We may even spot an overwintering **Green Sandpiper**.

Raptors feature heavily during the winter, when several species form communal roosts, and while most of the species mentioned could be bumped into during the course of regular birding, we will look at roost sites for **Western Marsh Harrier** (pleasingly common these days), **Hen Harrier**, **Peregrine Falcon**, **Merlin**, **Common Kestrel**, **Eurasian Sparrowhawk**, and

sometimes **Rough-legged Buzzard** (an irruptive winter visitor) or **White-tailed Eagle**, a species that is expanding its range in the country due to recent national reintroduction programs and an increasing, and thus wandering, population in Europe. We will also have no problem finding the spectacular **Red Kite**, a species that is bouncing back tremendously after years of persecution, probably one of the best-looking birds of prey in the UK. While we wait at the roost sites, we may also find some of the secretive species of the area like **Short-eared Owl**, **Western Barn Owl**, **Common Crane**, **Eurasian Spoonbill**, and **Eurasian Bittern**.



*A close-quartering **Western Barn Owl** in the winter late-afternoon sunlight, a spectacular sight!*

Several of the beaches and surrounding marshlands can support some interesting passerines such as **Snow Bunting**, **Twite**, **Horned (Shore) Lark**, **European Rock Pipit**, **Water Pipit**, and **Meadow Pipit**, while the local farmland may hold **Eurasian Skylark**, **Common Reed Bunting**, **Yellowhammer**, **Corn Bunting**, and mixed finch flocks. The woodland may support **Tawny Owl**, **Eurasian Jay**, **European Green Woodpecker**, and **Great Spotted Woodpecker**. Woodland slightly inland from the coast along the Norfolk and Suffolk border, such as the Thetford Forest area, can offer some birds more difficult elsewhere, such as **Red (Common) Crossbill**, **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**, **Hawfinch**, **Common Firecrest**, **Eurasian Nuthatch**, **Eurasian Siskin**, **Lesser Redpoll**, **Marsh Tit**, and maybe even overwintering **Great Grey Shrike**.

There are so many more birds to consider in this part of the UK, ranging from the localized **Dartford Warbler**, present in a few coastal heathland areas, to an interesting mix of naturalized species such as **Rose-ringed Parakeet**, **Mandarin Duck**, and **Egyptian Goose**. We will search for as many species as possible during our time in this excellent birding area.

Overnight (five nights): Norfolk

Day 7. Transfer between Norwich and the City of York

We will travel between Norfolk and York after a final morning birding in East Anglia. We will likely stop at one or two locations on the way which may yield specific target species, and we will select these at the time based on our up-to-date local information. We might take a coastal route or a more inland route, depending on what is around and what we “need”. There are several waterbodies along the route that sometimes hold interesting species, and we may be able to find something along the lines of **Whooper Swan**, **Smew**, **Black-throated Loon** (Black-throated Diver), **Common Loon** (Great Northern Diver), **Red-throated Loon** (Red-throated Diver), **Horned** (Slavonian) **Grebe**, or **Black-necked** (Eared) **Grebe** to break up the drive.

In the afternoon we will arrive in York, a fascinating and beautiful ancient-walled city packed full of historical and cultural features (York Minster, Clifford’s Tower, Jorvik Viking Center, York Dungeons, The Shambles, The National Railway Museum, churches, and so much more) and we will be sure to fit in some time to explore this, one of Britain’s greatest and oldest cities. We will be based here for the next three nights while we spend time birding in wonderful Yorkshire, another of the UK’s great birding counties.

Overnight: York



Whooper Swans are an elegant winter visitor to the United Kingdom.

Days 8 - 9. Yorkshire birding

We will spend two full days exploring some of the many birding hotspots of North Yorkshire and East Yorkshire from our base in York (as well as around the excellent York area). Some of the sites usually exceptional for winter birding that we might visit include Yorkshire Wildlife

Trust (YWT) Askham Bog, YWT Wheldrake Ings, North York Moors National Park, RSPB Blacktoft Sands reserve, RSPB Fairburn Ings reserve, and RSPB Bempton Cliffs reserve.

We will concentrate our efforts on some of the species unlikely to have been seen earlier in the tour with the York area being good for the rapidly declining trio of **Willow Tit**, **Eurasian Tree Sparrow**, and **Corn Bunting**. We might even find those three species close to our accommodation, along with a great assortment of other farmland and woodland birds. The area around our accommodation is also excellent for a wide range of shorebirds (waders) and waterfowl. A large flock of **Whooper Swans** overwinter in the area (and occasionally attracts the rarer **Tundra** (Bewick's) **Swan**). **Pink-footed Goose** are frequent, as too are **Greater White-fronted Goose**, and occasionally scarcer species too. The York area is usually excellent for **Jack Snipe** and **Ruff** so we will look for those too.

We will drive through the beautiful North York Moors National Park, which offers the chance to find the *scotica* subspecies of **Willow Ptarmigan**, considered a full species by Avibase Taxonomic Concepts and known as Red Grouse, which would make it an endemic to the United Kingdom. The upland rivers here also hold **White-throated Dipper**, always a highlight.



***Willow Ptarmigan**, or Red Grouse as it is known in the United Kingdom, is an attractive endemic subspecies or species depending on your taxonomic standpoint.*

From the moors we will traverse our way down to the coast, where at this time of the year we might find **Iceland Gull** or **Glaucous Gull** hiding in amongst hundreds of **European Herring Gulls** (of which we should see two subspecies). We could also see species such as **Purple Sandpiper**, **Ruddy Turnstone**, and **European Shag** which might be more difficult further south – these species are likely to be easier the further north we go, depending on how the weather has been ahead of the tour. We will also look for seaducks, grebes, loons (divers), and auks that may

still be offshore, such as **Common Murre** (Common Guillemot) and **Razorbill**. We should also find **Northern Gannet**, **Northern Fulmar**, and **Black-legged Kittiwake** along the coast. As we are exploring the seashore, we will also look out for **European Rock Pipit**, **Lapland Longspur** (Lapland Bunting), **Snow Bunting**, and **Horned (Shore) Lark**.

It is highly likely that we will have seen a huge range of interesting passerines whilst birding in Norfolk and Suffolk, but Yorkshire does give further opportunities for a range of scarce species and depending on what we still “need” (or would like to try and see again), we could also look for **Bearded Reedling** (Bearded Tit), **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**, **European Stonechat**, **Water Pipit**, **Red (Common) Crossbill**, **Common Redpoll**, **Eurasian Bittern**, **Spotted Redshank**, **Little Egret**, **Great Egret**, **Little Gull**, **Mediterranean Gull**, and **Common Kingfisher**.

Gull roosts around the York area may enable us to see, amongst others, **Common Gull** (split from Mew Gull of North America, which is also now renamed to Short-billed Gull, following the IOC 11.2 update), **Yellow-legged Gull**, **Caspian Gull**, **Iceland Gull**, and **Glaucous Gull**.

Overnight (two nights): York



*We hope to find **Common Firecrest** during the tour. It has a shocking flash of color on its head!*

Day 10. Transfer between Yorkshire and Northumberland

This will be a travel day as we move between York and our base near Alnwick, Northumberland (another impressive place - Alnwick Castle and Alnwick Gardens are definitely worth exploring). Our journey will take us cross-country, and we will keep our eyes peeled for the stunning **Black Grouse**, a rare, localized, and highly protected species in England.

Overnight: Alnwick

Days 11 - 12. Northumberland Coast

We will have two full days birding in Northumberland. We will expect similar species to those listed above, but some coastal birding here should give us different geese, such as **Brant Goose** (Pale-bellied Brent Goose here rather than the Dark-bellied Brent Goose seen further south) and **Barnacle Goose** on the mudflats, along with **Common Shelduck** and a wide range of shorebirds, such as **Bar-tailed Godwit**, **Eurasian Curlew**, **Eurasian Oystercatcher**, **Grey Plover**, and others. We should also get further chances for **Horned** (Slavonian) **Grebe**, **Common Loon** (Great Northern Diver), **Red-throated Loon** (Red-throated Diver), **Black-throated Loon** (Black-throated Diver), **Purple Sandpiper**, **Ruddy Turnstone**, **Sanderling**, and maybe a lingering **European Shag**, **Great Skua**, **Black-legged Kittiwake**, or **Northern Gannet**. **Red Kite** and recently arrived **Rough-legged Buzzard** from Europe are also possible.

Interesting passerines possible here could include **Snow Bunting**, **Lapland Longspur** (Lapland Bunting), **Bohemian Waxwing**, **Horned** (Shore) **Lark**, **European Rock Pipit**, and **Twite** among the more common and widespread resident, and aforementioned winter migrant species.



*We will look for overwintering **Snow Bunting** during our time on the east coast.*

Large flocks of **Common Scoter** overwintering along the coast of Northumberland often include other common species, such as **Red-breasted Merganser**, **Velvet Scoter**, **Long-tailed Duck**, and **Common Eider**, but may also contain the odd surprise of something much rarer, like **King Eider**, **Black Scoter**, or **White-winged Scoter**. We will be sure to keep a careful eye on that possibility over the course of our stay.

We will bird at some spectacular sites while in Northumberland, none more so than on the Holy Island of Lindisfarne. This island is reached via a drivable causeway, the mudflats packed with birds, the sea often swarming, and the island itself a bit of a winter rarity magnet. We will be

keeping our eyes peeled for a wide range of birds whilst here. Other sites we will check out (that are no less impressive really), include Beadnell Bay, Bamburgh Castle, and Northumberland Wildlife Trust (NWT) East Chevington reserve.

Overnight (two nights): Alnwick

Day 13. Northumberland to London

We will have a final morning birding session in Northumberland before we drive south towards London where the tour will conclude. We will pay careful attention to the local rare-bird news (such as Birdguides, Surfbirds, and Rare Bird Alert) and see if we can add something interesting along the route, maybe some newly arrived **Bohemian Waxwing** or something else exciting?

Overnight: Heathrow Airport area, London

Day 14. International departure

This is a non-birding day with international departures from Heathrow.

Overnight: Not included

Please note that the itinerary cannot be guaranteed as it is only a rough guide and can be changed (usually slightly) due to factors such as availability of accommodation, updated information on the state of accommodation, roads, or birding sites, the discretion of the guides and other factors. In addition, we sometimes have to use a different international guide from the one advertised due to tour scheduling.

Duration:	14 days
Group Size:	5 - 8
Dates:	09 – 22 January 2023 08 – 21 January 2024
Start:	London, England (Heathrow Airport)
End:	London, England (Heathrow Airport)
Prices:	GBP£ 4,895 per person sharing – based on 5 - 8 participants (2023) GBP£ 5,175 per person sharing – based on 5 - 8 participants (2024)
Single Supplements:	GBP£ 875 (2023) GBP£ 905 (2024)

Price includes:

All accommodation (Day 1 until Day 13 as described above, or similar)

Meals (from dinner on Day 1 until breakfast on Day 14)

Expert tour leader

Birdwatching site entrance fees

All ground transport and tolls/taxes while on tour

Price excludes:

All flights

Hot, alcoholic, and soft drinks unless included in part of a meal package (e.g. at breakfasts)

Expenditures due to flight cancellations/delays or other causes beyond our control (force majeure)

Visa fees if visa required

Departure tax if required

Items of a personal nature, e.g. gifts, laundry, internet access, phone calls etc.

Entrance fees to non-birdwatching sites (e.g. cultural site visits)

Any pre- or post-tour accommodation, meals, or birding/sightseeing excursions

Personal travel insurance

Gratuities (please see our [tipping guidelines blog](#))